

Transportation Strategies for Students Who Are Homeless

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act requires all public school districts to provide transportation to the school of origin when requested by the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth following “best interest” and “feasibility” considerations. The school of origin is defined as either the school the child attended when permanently housed or the school last enrolled.

“(I) If the homeless child or youth continues to live in the area served by the local education agency in which the school of origin is located, the child’s or youth’s transportation to and from the school of origin shall be provided or arranged by the local educational agency in which the school of origin is located.”

“(II) If the homeless child’s or youth’s living arrangements in the area served by the local educational agency of origin terminate and the child or youth, though continuing his or her education in the school of origin, begins living in an area served by another local education agency, the local educational agency of origin and the local education agency in which the homeless child or youth is living shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing the child with transportation to and from the school of origin. If the local educational agencies are unable to agree upon such method, the responsibility and costs for transportation shall be shared equally” (emphasis added). (Section 722 (g) (J)(iii))

Additionally, McKinney-Vento requires providing transportation for a child who becomes homeless while attending a preschool program administered by the district, if the district provides transportation to “housed” preschool students. (Section 722 (g)(F)(i))

There are a number of approaches public school districts can take in providing transportation to students experiencing homelessness including:

- rerouting bus routes past motels, shelters, transitional living homes, etc.;
- using existing routes established between districts;
- providing public bus passes to older students;
- contractual agreements;
- using taxis; and
- working with other public agencies.

It is the school district’s responsibility to provide transportation to students who are homeless. Each district may determine the mode of transportation.

Contractual Agreements

Contractual agreements are one of the most inexpensive ways for districts to provide transportation to a student’s school of origin. Contractual agreements are negotiated between the school district and a parent/guardian/youth.

A parent/guardian/youth may refuse to use their own vehicle since the obligation to provide transportation is the responsibility of the school district. If a parent/guardian/youth agrees to use their vehicle to get to school, the school district reimburses for costs. Suggestions for such an agreement might include:

- Actual miles from home to district.
- Ensure the rate of reimbursement is similar to other district transportation reimbursement agreements.
- Reimbursement based on actual days of student attendance.
- Agree on one fixed rate of reimbursement—this will save district paperwork if a child lives with a parent one week, stays with relatives the next week, etc.

- Staff member meets a family at an assigned gas station every Friday and pays for gas based on their children's school attendance for the week.

Janesville Contracts with a Community Member

Because of safety concerns regarding transporting young children in taxis, the School District of Janesville decided to contract with a community member to transport young children to and from school. Janesville placed a newspaper ad asking retired people to respond if they were interested in being paid to provide district transportation services. The district pays the contractor for morning, mid-morning, and afternoon services. Janesville provides the following:

- Background check of the driver;
- Health physical;
- Vehicle inspection;
- Passenger and route information; and
- Pay a flat stipend of \$1.00/mile, an additional \$0.485/mile (federal reimbursement rate) to reimburse the driver for additional insurance coverage, and a \$5.00/morning and \$5.00/afternoon retainer fee.

Please contact Steven J. Eichman at seichman@janesville.k12.wi.us or (608) 743-5016 for additional information about this creative transportation program.

Staff Transportation

If a staff member is willing to transport a student experiencing homelessness to and from home, the staff member should be under contract with the school district. The employee should be reimbursed for additional costs incurred while providing transportation. All requirements for alternative vehicles and drivers, including background checks, health physical, vehicle inspection, and insurance, as specified under Wisconsin Statutes Section 121.555, would apply. Your district may have to pay additional liability insurance to cover staff transportation services, however this cost may be less expensive than using a school bus or van. See *Transportation Using Alternative Vehicles* at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sms/transhpg.html> for additional information.

Community Agencies

Talk to your community agencies about the possibility of providing limited transportation for students who are homeless. Emergency shelters may be willing to temporarily transport children to school while the district is making other transportation arrangements. Shelters should be reimbursed for transportation costs.

Transportation Forms

On our website is a *Transitional Education Interdistrict Agreement* form that the Madison, Middleton-Cross Plains, Monona Grove, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Verona, and Waunakee Community school districts developed to facilitate transportation arrangements between districts. They also created a *Directory of Homeless Liaisons and School Contacts* flyer that is shared with families and community agencies in all seven districts. In addition, the Middleton-Cross Plains School District created transportation and homeless forms that you may find helpful to use in your district.

Please contact DPIhomeless@dpi.wi.gov with transportation initiatives your district has developed to help ensure the educational stability of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

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